Przemysław Wilk
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2242-7481
University of Opole
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9455-7384
University of Opole
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu

CONSTRUCTING SOLIDARITY IN DISCOURSE: A PRAGMA-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SPEECHES BY PRESIDENT ZELENSKY ADDRESSED TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Abstract: The article presents the findings of a pilot study of President Wolodymir Zelensky's solidarity discourse. They illustrate the use of salient linguistic means and discursive strategies of solidarity building in the light of the Russian military attack on Ukraine in 2022. Based on discourse analysis and corpus linguistics, the study focuses on the linguistic patterns of constituting inclusivity through personal deixis. This is complemented by the mapping of an overarching discursive strategy of the construction of togetherness, namely proximization. Conducted from the perspective of the solidarity leader, the research identifies the above strategies as crucial to shaping political support by developing a community of shared values and experiences.

Keywords: solidarity discourse, solidarity building, Zelensky, pragma-linguistics, deixis

Introduction

February 24, 2022 marked a fully-fledged Russian aggression on Ukraine as an escalation of the existing military conflict which began in 2014. The invasion has been labelled as the biggest attack on a European country since World War II and has drawn the attention of the international community, with some states vociferously condemning it while others cautiously warning against its spiraling into a world-wide conflict. Within the next weeks it became clear that without foreign support Ukraine stood no chance in the confrontation, so the newly elected president, Wolodymyr Zelensky, turned for aid by addressing politicians and international organizations in a series of speeches with an intention to mobilize them to form a joint front against the aggressor. To do so, Zelensky had to create a symbolic

common space of experience and to foster a sense of solidarity in trying to win allies in what seemed to morph into a long and draining war.

This pilot study focuses on the concept of solidarity discourse and its role in constructing symbolic communities of shared values and common experiences. Grounded in discourse analysis and corpus linguistics, the study analyzes a purposeful sample of Zelensky's speeches addressed to the United Nations and NATO in an attempt to identify the salient linguistic strategies of constructing community and fostering solidarity, particularly deixis and framing. It is demonstrated how a strategic use of pronouns as well as a discursive strategy of proximization (understood as a coordinated rhetorical maneuver to represent something distant in terms of time, space or values as closer, and thus as more threatening or urgent) serve to motivate discourse participants to come together and unite against a common enemy (Cap 2008; 2013).

1. Towards the notion of solidarity discourse

Both s o l i d a r i t y and d i s c o u r s e are key concepts in social theory that have been thoroughly discussed in the literature. Solidarity is generally understood as the sense of unity, mutual support, and shared values or interests among individuals or groups within a society. It helps explain how individuals and groups relate to each other, cooperate, and work towards common goals. According to R. Scollon, S. W. Scollon and H. R. Jones (2011), solidarity is an overt manifestation of involvement and concern. Discourse, on the other hand, is a complex concept that encompasses both written and spoken communication, as well as the broader system of language, knowledge, and power relations, which shape the way people understand and interpret social reality. Discursive practices, especially in institutional communication, not only represent, but also construct social reality, which includes the shaping of social norms, identities, and ideologies (van Dijk 1998; Hart 2014). These two constructs can be brought together under the specific notion or subtype of s o l i d a r i t y d i s c o u r s e , which, to the best of our knowledge, has not been exhaustively explored yet in either its theoretical or empirical dimension, especially in the context of war.

There is a number of studies which focus on solidarity as performed in discourse, most notably in political or humanitarian discourse (Ali Akbari Hamed | Behnam 2020; De Fina 1995; Fajar 2019; Kampf 2016; Molek-Kozakowska 2018). Most, however, define it in the broad sense as the language and rhetoric used to express and promote the idea of solidarity (Alharbi 2018; Grosse | Hetnarowicz 2016; Wydra | Pülzl 2014). Since solidarity signifies unity, cooperation, and support among individuals or groups who are assumed to share common values, interests, goals or challenges, language and rhetoric are deployed to foster a stronger sense

of connection and instigate empathy, spurring people to actively support one another. As we show in our study, solidarity discourse may also be strategically employed to inspire individuals from different backgrounds to come together for a common cause. Hence, the major function of solidarity discourse, as we understand and define it in the present study, is redefining (separate) social structures and (parallel) group dynamics in such a way as to construe new identities that are projected as more aligned.

It seems also important to refer to a potential overlap between the terms "solidarity discourse" and "discourse of solidarity." While the two expressions can be used interchangeably to refer to the language or rhetoric related to the concept of solidarity, the former may also indicate a type of communication which revolves around imposing the sense of solidarity on discourse participants (interpersonal metafunction), and the latter just highlights solidarity as the topic (ideational metafunction). It is the former that we want to explore in more nuance here. To clarify this, in the following section, we review some research on solidarity discourse in politics from the linguistic angle to show which devices and strategies have been identified as productive in fostering solidarity among discourse participants. Still, many studies of this type have been conducted from the perspective of the participants who express solidarity with another party. We approach solidarity discourse from the angle of the participant (or leader) who pleads for solidarity and hence attempts to cultivate solidary attitudes and mobilize discourse participants.

2. The language of solidarity

To perform its fundamental function, namely, to foster a sense of togetherness and common purpose and hence to build a community of experience and values, solidarity discourse is marked for its strategic use of language resources and a set of discursive techniques to achieve this goal. The language of solidarity, especially in political discourse, is to emphasize unity, cooperation, mutual support, and shared values among individuals, groups or communities. It involves highlighting the interconnectedness, minimizing the differences, and emphasizing the importance of working together to address shared problems and challenges.

In light of the above, one of its main linguistic means is a strategic use of personal deixis in discourse (Ali Akbari Hamed | Behnam 2020; De Fina 1995; Fajar 2019). Fostering a sense of togetherness is achieved primarily by the use of the inclusive 1st person plural *we* and *us*, whose common-identity-building power lies in exploiting the US – THEM dichotomy. Discourse participants are projected to belong to opposite groups and ideological dissonance is created between them, which often allows for construing THEM as a common enemy, since THEIR values are shown to be radically different. The dichotomous US – THEM continuum

manifests itself in discourse in what T. A. van Dijk (1998) terms the i d e o l o g i c a l s q u a r e , namely a set of strategies of positive self- and negative other-evaluation. This set works elegantly for solidarity expression, whereupon a discourse participant is repeatedly projected to belong to and affiliate with US. As far as our study is concerned, we note that the dichotomous opposition is not a sufficient theoretical frame to capture a more complex and diverse practice of pleading for solidarity, and hence we propose a trichotomous I | YOU – WE – THEM operationalization, which seems to be better suited for the purpose.

Another common way of creating a community is through positive framing. The power of framing has been long recognized by discourse analysts (Hart 2010, 2014; Lakoff 2010), often with reference to metaphor and metonymy. As far as solidarity cultivation is concerned, A. Hristova (2015) demonstrates how framing, in the form of metaphors and culture-specific scripts, allows president Obama to project a sense of unity and enhance social cohesion despite polarization. S. Wallaschek (2020), in his meso-discursive approach to the construction of solidarity, recognizes frames as the fundamental structures responsible for either foregrounding or backgrounding information about selected actors or events in discourse. Framing in the service of fostering solidarity can be practiced through presupposing common experiences and identities by invoking shared history and/or cultural references or by using colloquial language or elements of banal nationalism.

Some studies have also focused on solidarity building through the lens of speech acts and politeness theories. M. Matsuoka and R. Matsuoka (2020), for example, discuss solidarity fostering strategies, operationalized with reference to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, employed in Zelensky's speech to the nation of Japan. Z. Kampf (2016), on the other hand, discusses the use of the performative verb *le-varech* and its English equivalents *congratulate, welcome, support, thank, praise, greet* and *bless* as solidarity-enhancing devices, which allows him to propose a list of speech acts of solidarity. In a similar, yet more elaborate, form, A. Alharbi (2018) proposes a performative theory of solidarity discourse, where linguistic politeness and speech acts make solidarity discourse both performative (as it performs the function of building solidarity) and constitutive (as it constitutes social alignments).

Summing up, the following language features are designated as salient patterns found in expressions of solidarity discourse: (1) inclusive language: creating a sense of collective identity and sense of belonging by emphasizing that discourse participants are part of the same group; (2) positive framing: employing appraisal to inspire self-worth and motivation within the audience and to drive collective action and change; (3) references to shared culture: drawing on common cultural scripts, well-known history or shared heritage to strengthen the sense of collective belonging; (4) projections of a common enemy or goal: identifying the shared enemy or challenge that needs to be overcome in order to unite people around a common

objective; and (5) call to action: encouraging people to take specific actions by appealing to a sense of responsibility, emphasizing the importance of collaboration.

3. Analysis

In this section we discuss the most frequent and salient means of solidarity building that we have been able to identify in the sample of Zelensky's speeches, with the focus on the use of personal deixis (pronouns in the trichotomous continuum explained above) and the utilization of proximization, a strategy which is inclusive of many specific lower-rank patterns mentioned above, and consists in representing something distant in terms of time, space or values as closer; thus often as more threatening (Cap 2008; 2013).

3.1. Data and methodology

The corpus for our study comprises a selection of Zelensky's speeches addressed to an international political audience, available from the official website www.president.gov.ua. The time frame of the data sampling, namely from February 24, 2022 (the first day of the Russian military invasion on Ukraine) until December 31, 2022 (the end of year), has yielded 505 speech items (SIs henceforth). Next, we have rejected all SIs addressed to the nation of Ukraine and focused exclusively on the ones intended for an international audience, which we were able to divide into: (1) 59 SIs addressed to diverse international audiences (e.g., academic societies, participants in cultural events, conference audiences), and (2) 81 SIs addressed to international political audience. Out of the latter we have selected all the SIs addressed to the United Nations (5 SIs of 6,941 words in total, UN corpus henceforth) and NATO (3 SIs of 4,157 words in total, NATO corpus henceforth). In total our sample amounts to 11,098 words.

We manually tagged our corpus for semantic categories of salient discourse participants, which allows us to make specific claims concerning Zelensky's strategic discursive construction, representation and grouping of actors, based on numerical data. The tagging was applied to pronouns and possessive adjectives only with the use of the following categories: UA (Ukraine), UN (United Nations), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), UA+UN (Ukraine and UN) and UN+NATO (Ukraine and NATO). In the analysis presented below, all the above semantic tags are visible in the exemplary data excerpts and figures provided.

Our analytical protocol is grounded in discourse analysis, an interdisciplinary and eclectic collection of methods for analyzing language uses with the aim of uncovering the underlying power relations and ideologies in text (van Dijk 1998).

Qualitative discourse analysis hinges on the close reading protocols, which involves thoroughly reading the data multiple times while being extremely attentive to any potentially salient and relevant patterning. We find this approach particularly fit for our study as analyzing solidarity discourse inevitably leads to uncovering the strategies of projecting relations between discourse participants and ideological polarizations (US vs. THEM), which is most evident in expressions of sharing common values and beliefs as opposed to the rejection of unacceptable principles and moral standards of the antagonist. While this protocol is principally qualitative in nature, we believe in mitigating our potential biases by referring to numerical evidence. Hence, we use WordSmith Tools word processing software (Scott 2007) for concordance and plot functionalities. The former allows one to see a given word or phrase in all corpus contexts while the latter shows the distribution of a given word or phrase in the corpus. Moreover, to showcase the salience of particular words and phrases in the corpus, we employ the keyness parameter, which estimates the semantic prominence of given words in the corpus.

3.2. Linguistic devices of solidarity building: personal deixis

The rationale behind focusing on personal pronouns in our study stems from the high keyness (see section 3.1) of the personal pronoun *we* and the possessive adjective *our* in the UN and NATO samples. The personal pronoun *we* ranks 12 with the keyness of 97,14 in the NATO corpus, whereas the possessive adjective *our* ranks 5th with the keyness of 163,08 in the NATO corpus and 16th with the keyness of 106,77 in the UN corpus. As mentioned above, analyzing solidarity discourse from the perspective of a leader who pleads for solidarity requires a trichotomous model of discourse participants continuum (Figure 1).

| I vs. YOU – **WE** – THEY | conceptualization |

⬇

| exclusive WE vs. YOU – **inclusive WE** – THEY | operationalization |

⬇

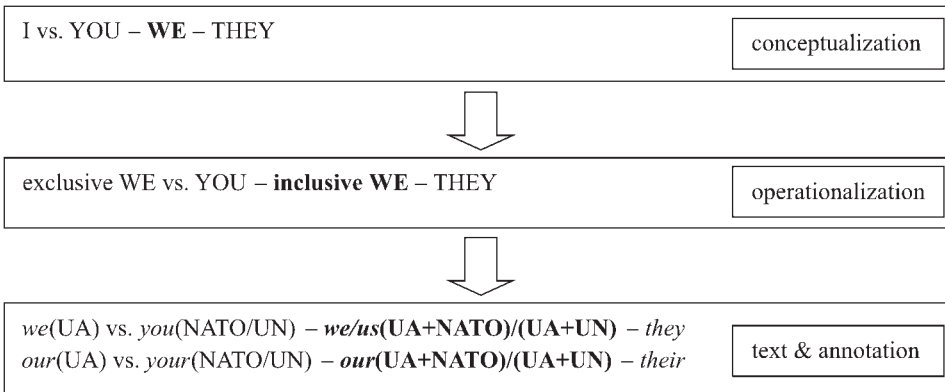| *we*(UA) vs. *you*(NATO/UN) – ***we/us*(UA+NATO)/(UA+UN)** – *they*
our(UA) vs. *your*(NATO/UN) – ***our*(UA+NATO)/(UA+UN)** – *their* | text & annotation |

Fig. 1. A trichotomous model of discourse participants continuum

Figure 1 shows a progression of the discourse participants as relevant for our study. The top box includes the schematic trichotomous conceptualization of discourse participants strategically divided into (1) I vs. YOU, (2) WE, and (3) THEY. It is important to understand that the I vs. YOU distinction is not strategically motivated, and hence does not play a significant role in the solidarity discourse under analysis because both participants are on the same side of the ideologically polarized continuum as opposed to THEM. Hence, we treat them as one. As can be easily inferred from the middle box, the most crucial and strategically purposeful is the middle inclusive WE, which is the central point of solidarity discourse with its potential of creating a community of common values and experience. The bottom box illustrates a corpus-tag-based breakdown of discourse participants as realized at the linguistic level by the pronouns *we/us* (subject and object respectively), and the possessive adjective *our*. It is here that we clearly see what the intended community looks like: Ukraine stands united with UN and/or NATO against a common enemy (THEM, that is Russia). From the above, it can be concluded that the edges of the continuum represent the current state of affairs while the middle is the intended target of solidarity discourse, namely an imagined community united against the antagonist.

It is worth mentioning that the discourse participants in the corpus are not only referred to by means of the above categories but are also labeled differently: *we/us*(UA) is also realized as *Ukraine* or *Ukrainians*; *you*(NATO) and *you*(UN) as *NATO*, *UN* or *the Alliance*; and *they* as *Russia*, *Moscow*, *the Russian leadership*, *the Russian state*, *the occupiers*, *the terrorist state*, *the Russian army*, *Russian troops* or *tyrants*. It is significant, however, that there is no alternative labeling for the inclusive WE, which means that creating a community is exclusively realized by the use of the *we/us* pronouns and the possessive adjective *our*.

Another observation on pronouns comes from the plot analysis. Given the distribution of 13 occurrences of *we*(UA+NATO), 8 of *us*(UA+NATO) and 17 of *our*(UA+NATO) in the NATO corpus (Figure 2, 3 and 4) as well as 21 of *we*(UA+UN) in the UN corpus (Figure 5), it is clear that the increase in the frequency of corpus occurrences of the linguistic expressions is correlated with the duration of the Russian aggression on Ukraine.
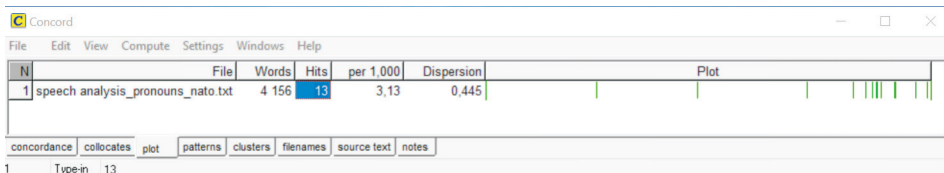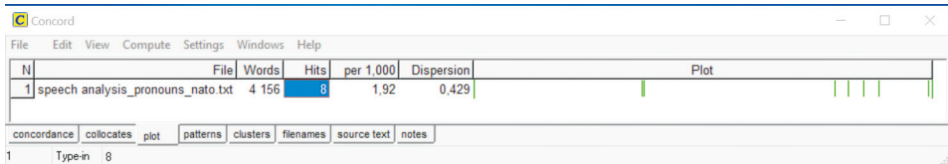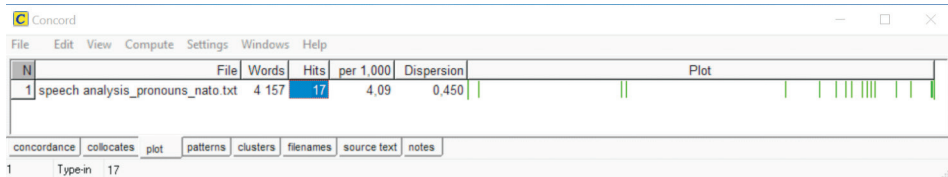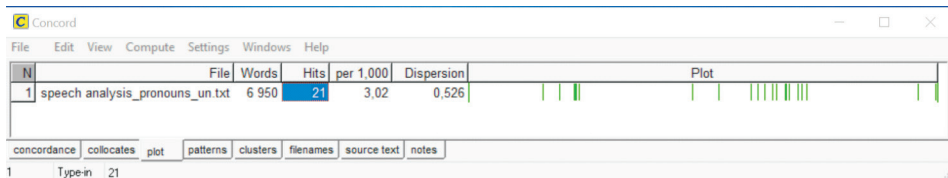

Fig. 2. Plot distribution of *we*(UA+NATO)

Fig. 3. Plot distribution of *us*(UA+NATO)

Fig. 4. Plot distribution of *our*(UA+NATO)

Fig. 5. Plot distribution of *we*(UA+UN)

This means that the longer the aggression lasts, the more frequently the president uses the community building strategy of inclusive WE deixis, as the political situation gets more intense and requires urgent action. Hence, it can be concluded that Zelensky purposefully employs the inclusive WE to mobilize actors as well as to reinforce the sense of togetherness in the predicament and a shared responsibility for the future of Europe. Examples 1-2 illustrate Zelensky's strategic use of the inclusive WE:

(1) All of you(NATO) see what endangers us(UA+NATO). All of us(UA+NATO)! All who cannot imagine their life without freedom. All of you(NATO) can see Ukraine's significant contribution to the protection of our(UA+NATO) community. Everyone sees how important it is that we(UA+NATO) really united in defense after February 24.

(2) In order for a sense of justice to return to international relations, we(UA+UN) must all confirm and force Russia to recognize that the inviolability of borders and peace are unconditional values for all nations.

3.3. Proximization as a discursive strategy of solidarity building

As mentioned above, poximization is a discursive strategy consisting in conceptually bringing physically and temporally distant events and states of affairs closer to the discourse participant, and presenting them as threatening (Cap 2008). While Cap defines proximization as a means to legitimize action, we emphasize the community building and mobilizing potential of proximization, as we see it fit for our study. We focus on demonstrating how the strategy aims at triggering a positive response in discourse participants and hence encourages them to undertake rational or emotionally instigated solidary actions (Cap 2013). In our corpus, we have been able to identify two major strategies: (1) proximization of a potential threat or danger, which is in alignment with Cap's original theory, called here n e g a t i v e p r o x i m i z a t i o n ; (2) proximization in the sphere of extension of common values, morals and culture, called here p o s i t i v e p r o x i m i z a t i o n .

Regarding the cases of negative proximization (examples 3-5, 1 above), its rationale is to present a given situation or idea as directly threatening to the designated discourse participants.

> (3) I am sure you(NATO) already understand that Russia does not intend to stop in Ukraine. Does not intend and will not. It wants to go further. Against the eastern members of NATO. The Baltic states, Poland – that's for sure.
> (4) The distance from Kyiv to Madrid is less than the range of the missiles used against us(UA) today.
> (5) Yesterday, the Russian army also struck with MLRS at […] ordinary people, civilians. None of them were military. Just a queue to get water. Eight people were killed, including a 15-year-old boy, his name was Danylo. And the oldest among the dead was 68 years old. And I want you (UN) to hear now the names of four women killed by this strike: Viktoriya, Iryna, Olena, Liudmyla.

Zelensky tries to construe Russia as a direct enemy to the European community, with example (4) being perhaps the most emphatic case of construing an imminent threat, followed by the urgent need to take action in order to stop the enemy. It is also clearly visible (example 1) that Ukraine is conceptualized as a hero or defender who, provided help is granted, can avert the invasion before it spreads to other parts of Europe. The spatial proximization is effective in comparing the distance between European capital cities to the range of missiles, which envisions a possibility of many NATO states being in danger (example 4). Moreover, vivid imagery intended to emphasize the scale of a potential thereat (atrocities committed by the Russians) is a case of negative proximization (example 5). By making the consequences of war personal and focusing on individual, named victims, Zelensky proximizes the issue in one more way. It is no longer only about territory and values, but about broken families and killed children, which no-one should be able to ignore. It can

be concluded that such uses of negative proximization can have a powerful impact on the discourse participants as they trigger an emotional reaction or moral outrage, and hence act as effective motivators to instigate action.

Positive proximization often covers somehow untypical cases of proximization, and involves the projection of the overlap in allegiance to basic values and human rights (Cap 2013). Zelensky's strategy consists in painstakingly emphasizing that Ukraine and the international community are on the same side as far as the perception of fundamental values of freedom or democracy is concerned, as in examples 6-8:

> (6) Since 2013 and until today, Ukrainians, with the support of our (UA) friends, have demonstrated that nothing is impossible for us (UA+NATO) when we (UA+NATO) are truly united and defend our (UA+NATO) unconditional values. So, let's maintain our (UA+NATO) unity! And let's fight for freedom!
> (7) In those months of 2013-2014, when Ukrainians in the squares and streets of our (UA) cities defended the right to European choice for our (UA) state, an important thing happened for our (UA+NATO) entire community – a community of nations united by the values of freedom, respect for law, democracy and diversity.
> (8) Today, it is as a result of Russia's actions on the territory of my state, on the territory of Ukraine, that the most heinous war crimes of all time since the end of World War II are being committed.

Zelensky's strategy of building community consists here in the listing of top shared values with an intention to make discourse participants unite under the aegis of loyalty to fundamental human rights. It is also here that references to WWII history (example 8) are used to advocate action (bring the past back as current *today* in temporal proximization) and build a sense of common purpose on account of preventing the repetition of what the humankind had collectively experienced then.

4. Conclusions

As the results of our pilot study indicate, there are two salient means of building solidarity that transpire from our corpus data, namely personal deixis and proximization. As far as the former is concerned, we have shown how a strategic representation of actors (as inclusive WE) can be effectively enacted for urgent appeals. Pronouns are powerful tools of building a symbolic community with common purposes and values and of excluding the antagonists. This pattern has been demonstrated to intensify for the sake of mobilizing international actors in Zalensky's speeches, with a solidarity-based and responsibility-driven response to imminent common enemy. It is important to notice that proximization, be it negative or positive, as a community-building strategy can have many discursive instantiations and hence is not tied to an easily definable set of linguistic devices or discursive strategies.

Importantly, given the space restrictions, we have not been able to discuss the phenomenon of symbolic community building in its full-fledged form. There is a number of rhetorical devices and discursive strategies, from metaphor and metonymy to intensification and sentiment, whose main aim is to put pressure on discourse participants to take prompt actions. To obtain a better understanding of community-building potentials of solidarity discourse, it would also be advisable to conduct a more fine-grained analysis of figurative construals of, for example, Russia and its political regime as the aggressor/common enemy, or to study various topoi, for example, the topos of a hero/defender, or that of an innocent war victim. Further studies in this matter should contribute to a better understanding of the complexity behind solidarity discourse, especially in terms of its function of creating a symbolic community of shared values and experience.

References

Alharbi, A. (2018), Towards a performative theory of solidarity discourse, [in:] Cogent Art & Humanities 5 (1), 1495044.

Ali Akbari Hamed, L. | Behnam, B. (2020), Linguistic devices of identity representation in English political discourse with a focus on personal pronouns: Power and solidarity, [in:] The Journal of English Language Pedagogy and Practice 13, 205-229.

Cap, P. (2008), Towards the proximization model of the analysis of legitimization in political discourse, [in:] Journal of Pragmatics 40, 17-41.

Cap, P. (2013), Proximization: The pragmatics of symbolic distance crossing. Amsterdam.

De Fina, A. (1995), Pronominal choice, identity and solidarity in political discourse, [in:] Text – Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse 5, 379-410.

Fajar, M. (2019), Power and solidarity reflected in the use of pronouns portrayed in hybrid political discourse, [in:] Journal of English Education, Linguistics, and Literature 5, 57-72.

Grosse, T. G. | Hetnarowicz, J. (2016). The discourse of solidarity and the European migrant crisis, [in:] Yearbook of Polish European Studies 19, 35-61.

Hart, C. (2010), Critical Discourse Analysis and cognitive science: New perspectives on immigration discourse. Palgrave.

Hart, C. (2014), Discourse, grammar and ideology: Functional and cognitive perspective. Bloomsbury.

Hristova, A. (2015), Solidarity building strategies in political discourse. MA thesis. University of Sofia. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.17908.50565

Kampf, Z. (2016), All the Best! Performing solidarity in political discourse, [in:] Journal of Pragmatics 93, 47-60.

Lakoff, G. (2010), Why it matters how we frame the environment, [in:] Environmental Communication 4 (1), 70-81.

Matsuoka, M. | Matsuoka, R. (2022), Cultivation of solidarity and soft power: Ukrainian president Zelensky's 2022 speech to Japan, [in:] East European Journal of Psycholinguistics 9, 98-115.

Molek-Kozakowska, K. (2018), Distance crossing and alignment in online humanitarian discourse, [in:] Journal of Pragmatics 124, 1-13. DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2017.11.010

Scollon, R. | Scollon, S. W. | Jones, H. R. (2011). Intercultural communication: A discourse approach. 3rd. ed. Wiley.

Scott, M. (2007), Oxford WordSmith Tools. Oxford.

van Dijk, T. A. (1998), Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach. London | Thousand Oaks | New Delhi.

Wallaschek, S. (2020), The discursive construction of solidarity: Analysing public claims in Europe's migration crisis, [in:] Political Studies 68 (1), 74-92. DOI: 10.1177/0032321719831585

Wydra, D. | Pülzl, H. (2014), Solidarity discourse in national parliaments: The European crisis hits home!, [in:] Archiv des Völkerrechts 1, 92-112.